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A S E R M O N,

DELIVERED AT THE

BOW MEETING-HOUSE, Exeter, July 2d, 1794,

BEFORE THE

SOCIETY of UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS,

Established in the West of England,

FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE AND THE PRAG-
TICE OF VIRTUE, BY THE DISTRIBUTION OF BOOKS.

Published at the Request of the Society,

By T. REYNELL.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

The CORRESPONDENCE between COUNSELLOR
WHITE and Mr. TOULMIN.



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TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

The CORRESPONDENCE between COUNSELLOR
WHITE and Mr. TOULMIN,

Relative to the Refusal of GEORGE's MEETING-HOUSE, Exeter,
for the Religious Service usually held on the Day of the general
Meeting of the Society.

E X E T E R :

PRINTED BY E. GRIGG; AND SOLD BY J. JOHNSON,
No. 72, ST. PAUL's CHURCH-YARD, LONDON.



P R E F A C E.

THIS Sermon was to have been delivered at George's Meeting-House, in Exeter. The following Papers, which agreeably to the unanimous Resolution of the Society of Unitarian Christians, are prefixed to the discourse, will shew why it was delivered at another place.

No. I.

The Notice delivered at George's Meeting-house, on Sunday, June 29, 1794.

"You are desired to take notice, that Wednesday next; being the day appointed for the Annual Meeting of the Society of Unitarian Christians established for promoting Christian Knowledge, and the practice of virtue, by the distribution of books, a Sermon will be preached on the occasion in this place: the service to begin at eleven o'Clock."

No. II.

Counsellor WHITE's first Note.

"Counsellor White presents his respectful compliments to the Rev. Mr. Toulmin, and, as one of the Trustees for the New Meeting-house, (George's) would beg the favour of Mr. Toulmin's informing him whether he has had the permission

mission of the Trustees for giving the notice relating to the Sermon to be preached at that Meeting-house next Wednesday.

Sunday noon, 29th June, 1794."

No. III.

Mr. TOULMIN's first Note.

" J. Toulmin's respects wait on Mr. White. He received the notice, which he read this morning, from Mr. Kenrick, last evening, as what he himself intended to read had he officiated to-day."

No. IV.

Counsellor WHITE's second Note.

" Mr. White is much obliged to Mr. Toulmin for his information, and desires, as one of the Trustees, that he will give notice to Mr. Kenrick immediately to contradict the notice given this morning at the New Meeting-house this afternoon; Mr. White intending to call a meeting of the Trustees to-morrow on the subject.

Sunday, 2 o'Clock."

No. V.

Mr. TOULMIN's second Note.

" Mr. Toulmin will not have an opportunity to comply with Mr. White's request, as Mr. Kenrick is at Crediton."

No. VI.

No. VI.

Counsellor WHITE'S Letter to Mr.

TOULMIN.

" Rev. Sir,

" Agreeable to the information which I had the pleasure of giving you yesterday, there has been a meeting of a Majority of the Trustees of the New Meeting-house this afternoon, when the several papers which have passed between us, relating to the notice of preaching the anniversary Sermon of the Unitarian Society, were laid before them; and I am desired to say, that they are unanimously of opinion that the house should not be opened on the occasion, and have given their directions accordingly.

I am,

Your most obedient Servant

Monday Afternoon,

James White."

June 30, 1794.

No. VII.

Note from the Trustees and others of the
Bow Meeting-house.

" The Trustees and others of Bow Meeting, present their respects to the Rev. Mr. Kenrick, and request that himself and his Friends will make that use of the Bow Meeting-house on the morrow, which their Ancestors have been accustomed to glory in, viz, worshipping the Great God, according to the dictates of their own consciences.

Tuesday 4 o'Clock, July 1, 1794."

Extract from the Minutes of the Society of Unitarian Christians.

" Resolved, that the thanks of this Society be returned to the Trustees and other Members of the Bow Meeting-house, for the very liberal and handsome manner in which they offered them the use of the House for the religious service of this day."

That the public may better understand the views of this Association, it may be proper to subjoin in this place, the preamble to the Rules of the Society, as explanatory of their design.

*" THE Christian Religion deriving its origin from the
 " immediate revelation of God, and being the scheme
 " which infinite wisdom has chosen as best calculated to
 " lead men to virtue and happiness, must be of the greatest
 " value to mankind. But as it operates upon the minds of
 " those who embrace it only by the excellence of its doctrines
 " and institutions, its utility is lessened in proportion as
 " these are corrupted. That christianity has suffered great
 " injury by the additions made to it, since the time of Christ
 " and his Apostles, is readily allowed by all protestants; and
 " they have exerted themselves with commendable zeal to re-
 " move them. To us it is equally evident that many errors
 " are still retained by Protestants themselves, no less per-
 " nicious than those which have been abandoned. To en-
 " deavour therefore to obtain a further reformation of reli-
 " gion,*

" gion, and to restore it to the standard of original purity,
 " must be regarded as a useful and benevolent undertaking,
 " worthy of the zealous exertions of all those who wish to
 " promote the religious improvement and happiness of the
 " human race. It is to accomplish this important purpose,
 " in conjunction with others of the same sentiments with
 " ourselves in other parts of the kingdom, that this Soci-
 " ety is formed.

" Considering that one principal obstruction to the pro-
 " gress of just sentiments in religion, has arisen from the
 " want of an open avowal of them by those by whom they
 " have been embraced, or of other methods of making them
 " known to the world, we have thought proper to associate
 " ourselves together, in order to distribute among those who
 " are disposed to enquire, such books as appear to us to con-
 " tain the purest account of the doctrines of revelation,
 " and to be best calculated to promote the interests of true
 " piety and virtue, but more particularly among such persons
 " as from their situation in life are precluded in a great
 " measure from obtaining the means of information, de-
 " claring it to be the fundamental principle of the Society,
 " in which we all agree, that there is but one God,
 " the Creator and Governor of the universe, without
 " an equal or a vicegerent, the only object of religious
 " worship; and that Jesus Christ was the most emi-
 " nent of those messengers which he has employed
 " to reveal his will to mankind, possessing extraordi-
 " nary powers similar to those received by other
 " prophets, but in a much higher degree.

" While

" While we thus declare our belief in the strict unity of
 " God, and cannot but regard every practice as idolatrous
 " which attributes any of the prerogatives of the Deity to
 " another, a conclusion in which we think ourselves war-
 " ranted by the language of scripture, we would not be un-
 " derstood to assert that we think such practices are attended
 " with the same immoral consequences as the idolatry which
 " prevailed in the ancient heathen world. That they are
 " however in all cases injurious, and in some highly cri-
 " minal, we have no doubt, but how far they may be so in
 " any particular instance we pretend not to determine, as
 " it must depend upon circumstances which can be known
 " only to the individuals concerned, and to that Being who
 " searches their hearts.

" In laying down the above principles as the fundamental
 " maxims of the Society, we do no more than exercise the
 " authority which every society possesses, of determining the
 " object for which they associate, and to the promoting
 " which they choose to limit their endeavours. No one can
 " justly complain that he is injured or aggrieved hereby.
 " If others should think fit to form societies for propagating
 " such views of the Christian Religion as are different
 " from those we entertain, they have an undoubted right to
 " do so, and they will not be censured by us; for we admit
 " in the most unrestrained sense, the right of every man to
 " think for himself in matters of religion, and apprehend
 " that this right extends to judging of the importance of
 " opinions as well as of the truth of them. We wish not
 " to prevent the discussion of what we deem the genuine
 " principles

*"principles of christianity, but to procure for them an im-
 "partial and candid examination: by this means we trust
 "that the truth will at length prevail, and the welfare of
 "the human race be greatly advanced."*

The Rules of the Society are principally taken from those adopted by an Institution for a similar purpose established in London. One of them requires that there should be a general meeting of the Subscribers every year in some place in the west of England, where any of the Members reside. And as the design of the Society is of a religious nature, it has been thought proper to have a religious Service upon the occasion, conducted by such persons as the Society shall from time to time appoint. The first public service was held at Crediton in September 1792, the year in which the Society was first instituted; the second at Taunton September 3, 1793. The discourses delivered on these occasions are both before the Public.

A S E R M O N.

TITUS II. v. 10th, "*Adorn the Doctrine.*"*

IT is the remark of a distinguished writer, that "really to inform the understanding corrects and enlarges the heart," and though we cannot but deplore that fact does not seem to prove the universality of the observation; though we must lament indeed that there are many as abandoned as they are greatly enlightened, it will easily be allowed, that knowledge and virtue ever ought to be inseparably connected. The acquisition of truth from any department of science, whether it relate to the heavens above or to the earth beneath, the constitution of man, or of the universe, tends at least to enlarge the comprehension. It sharpens our penetration; it enables us to trace with greater acuteness and success, the relation between effects and causes;

* The whole clause is, *that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*

It will certainly appear to many superfluous, yet, may not possibly be entirely useless to observe, that the expression "God our Saviour," relates to the Father alone. See 1. Tim. I. v. 11. 3. Tit. 211. 4. Jude 25.

causes ; and as an intimate friend is easily known amidst a multitude of strangers, so those who have become familiar with the venerable form of truth, will more readily discriminate it among a thousand semblances and delusions.

But besides this general tendency of knowledge to extend the powers of the mind, and consequently to quicken its perception of rectitude, it is to be observed, that all truths are either immediately or remotely calculated for moral influence. Many there are which themselves furnish the most direct consolation in distress, and constitute motives to virtuous exertion and perseverance ; while others, without possessing this direct influence, are nevertheless, in a practical view, highly valuable, as they prepare for the reception, illustrate the evidence, or lead to the contemplation of those which are adapted immediately to improve and adorn the human character. Truth may be considered as a large and complicated Machine, calculated to work out the virtue and felicity of the moral world. —All its parts are not of equal consequence, yet all are useful. Or if from an allusion to the works of art, we turn to the actual system of creation, we perceive one body differing from another in glory, yet each contributes to advance the sum of human happiness, and to display the benevolence of its Creator ; nor can we regard the Moon as useless, though it does not shine with the same splendor as the great Luminary of Day.

Such

Such being the natural tendency of truth, nothing can be more evident, than that men are under an indispensable obligation to proportion their attainments in moral habits and character, to their attainments in knowledge. The same criminal action, which, if performed by an uncultivated Indian, would perhaps only excite compassion for his ignorance, when practised even by an ordinary European, would naturally rouse our indignation. On the same principle we should sternly condemn in the enlightened Philosopher, the same proceeding which we should more slightly notice in his neighbour, from a consideration of more contracted and obscure conceptions. And when those who have pushed their intellectual progress beyond the usual attainments of mankind, do not avail themselves of those additional means of virtue, which their new principles supply, we appear justified in concluding, that the character is debased in the same degree that the mind is enlightened.

But we remark farther, that as it is thus important to the persons who have adopted any valuable opinions, that they apply them as far as they are capable of being applied, to moral purposes : so is this of no little moment to the spread of those opinions themselves, particularly if they be such as oppose established institutions and interests. Against the admission of such opinions, however really bene-

beneficial, the prejudice is always strong. It is difficult to convince men that themselves and their fathers have been mistaken on subjects of importance, and subjects to all appearance, as extremely plain as they are momentous. And when interest combines with this pride of our nature, the eyes of the understanding are often almost totally closed against the admission of truth. It may be added, that men see as they imagine, the clearest connection between their present sentiments and virtue; but how far novel opinions may possess this virtuous tendency, may "give them pause," and indeed they are generally prepared to suppose unfavourable tendencies which have no foundation in truth and nature.

Since such is the reluctance men feel against the reception of new doctrines, particularly on certain subjects, a reluctance, which nevertheless answers some valuable purposes, it is evidently incumbent upon the defenders of those doctrines, to use all innocent means of counteracting it. And we must immediately perceive, that it is a considerable advance towards the compleat removal of this reluctance, to shew by actual example, that those principles are productive, or at least are connected with others, which are immediately productive of fruits in the highest degree agreeable and salutary. Rectitude of life is a most powerful advocate for singular

gular doctrines, whether this rectitude flow directly from those principles, or from others which with them form part of a comprehensive system.

—The errors of a false creed, we may have had opportunities of observing, are sometimes in a manner swallowed up in the virtue of its followers, and men have been led to embrace absurdity, from the purity of its professors. And if the diffusion of error, with all its disadvantages, is thus in some degree capable of being effected by the morality of its disciples, the same cause must in a far greater degree assist in extending the dominion of truth.—If the absurdity of doctrines, absolutely contradictory to good sense and reason, may be so far counteracted by the pure and excellent discipline of their followers, as to draw converts from men of good [understandings, as well as good dispositions, what may not be expected in a cause where there are no absurdities to counteract, and where men are attracted to believe by the united influence of truth and virtue?

There are some methods of softening and conciliating prejudice, which we may well hesitate to adopt, and which, even the circumstance of their being employed with the best views, will never be able to vindicate. But when prejudice may be removed or diminished by acknowledged virtue, there can be no room even for a moment's doubt, and
it

must be indeed grossly criminal to refuse its application.

These general observations, my friends, may easily be accommodated to the purpose of our present meeting. In an address to a society of Christians, who upon examination and conviction, have embraced opinions singular indeed, and unpopular in the present day, though all of them as old as the Christian Revelation itself, it might possibly appear superfluous to detail before them the well-known grounds of their persuasion, or to enlarge on any particular article with which they must be supposed to be thoroughly acquainted. But there is one topic, which upon such occasions can never be deemed unseasonable. Such is the nature of man, that he is ever prone to acquiesce and to pride himself in knowledge, and to neglect those practices and habits which alone can render it valuable to himself, and which will most powerfully recommend it to the world: This being the case, I know not that I could have directed your attention, at this time, to a subject of greater propriety or consequence, than to an exhortation that you “adorn your doctrine.”

The peculiar doctrines or principles of the Society, by which we differ from our brethren around us, are these, that “there is but one God, the

Creator and Governor of the Universe, without an equal or a vicegerent, the only proper object of religious worship, and that Jesus Christ was the most eminent of those messengers which he has employed to reveal his will to mankind, possessing extraordinary powers, similar to those received by other prophets, but in a much higher degree."—Independently of the immediate practical tendency of our creed, we imagine it to place Revelation in a more clear and credible point of view, and by rendering its evidence more luminous, to impart additional strength and energy to the motives it affords for virtuous conduct. And while this is the fact, while our knowledge is thus in our own estimation adapted for moral purposes, we cannot but instantly feel, that it will be worse than useless to us, except we make a correspondent application of it; we shall be condemned by the Divine Being, and out of our own mouths, if with these superior advantages and inducements for moral excellence, we bring no fruit unto perfection.

Having remarked what is certainly the fact, that our peculiar opinions, however well established, are regarded in no favourable light by the world, it is to be added, according to the general principles we have laid down, that one admirable method of accomplishing our wish to diffuse these opinions among our brethren, will be to exhibit them with
that

that train of virtuous consequences, which they directly or remotely tend to produce. If this be indispensable on our own account, so is it most advisable for the sake of our cause ; which, indeed, if it be derived from the eternal fountain of truth, *will* eventually bear down all opposition, and contribute to fertilize and improve all nations, but which nevertheless, may be materially aided in its progress by the virtuous prudence and character of its advocates.

I now proceed to particularize some methods by which you may adorn your doctrine in the sight of God and of mankind : and in the first place, you will permit me to recommend to you meekness in communicating it. It is most clearly incumbent upon those who believe themselves in possession of important truth, to endeavour to diffuse it. These endeavours, however discreetly conducted, may possibly expose to the reproach of culpable officiousness, or intellectual pride ; as the rich bounty of a benevolent man is not unfrequently ascribed to ostentation. This circumstance, however, in either case, does not make charity cease to be a duty.— We are to exert ourselves in doing good by all the means in our possession ; and if we justly censure him who employs his wealth only to fill his coffers, we certainly can never acquit those who confine the lamp of knowledge to themselves ; for knowledge as the wise man truly observes, is rather

to be chosen than gold, and wisdom is more valuable than rubies.

But if it be a duty to endeavour to diffuse important truth, it will appear no less so to communicate it with mildness. To employ violence with a view to the diffusion of principles, is worthy only of a false, absurd, and pernicious creed. Popery could not have been propagated by encouraging the free exercise of reason. And Mahometanism would probably never have been established, or would, before this, have sunk into an empty name, if it had not been established by the sword. But, though violence may for a time support error, it can only injure the cause of truth. If the former is to be diffused, nothing is more essential than to prevent examination; if the latter, nothing more is necessary than to encourage it. But violence, instead of inducing to fair and unprejudiced enquiry, tends only to irritate, to strengthen prejudice, to make men conclude against a creed without examining it, and infer from the very conduct of its followers, that it is false, and will not bear examination. The absurdity of this proceeding, in those who believe themselves the advocates of truth, is most gross and palpable; and it is surely no compliment my Brethren, to suppose you clearly see its guilt and folly, and are as destitute of inclination, as in a public view you are of ability, to compel men to profess your particular opinions.

But

But it is not only of consequence to discourage the spirit which would exercise absolute violence, in order to spread any set of opinions; there is often a contemptuousness and acrimony of language employed on those occasions, against which likewise we should be extremely cautious. It is only ingenuous to admit, and I doubt not you will readily join in the observation, that if a rising sect be almost universally exposed to the resentment or ridicule of mankind, so we often perceive them in their turn, and when vindicating their peculiarities under too powerful temptations, to apply the language of lofty superiority and haughty scorn.— They are too apt to make their distinguishing tenets the touchstone even of common sense, and to monopolize the wisdom of the world. Behaviour of this kind, however, is not very consistent with a just sense of human weakness, nor is it calculated to soften disaffection, to excite impartial enquiry, and to win proselytes. To check this dogmatical and supercilious character, it is of advantage for men to reflect, that however confident they may be of the truth of their principles, however firm they may imagine the ground on which they are established, it is, nevertheless, *possible* that they may be in error. Persons of the first talents have been extremely decisive and dictatorial, and have afterwards been reduced to acknowledge their presumption. And the first impression of this fallibility

of our nature, will prevent men from applying to *any*, expressions of contempt and insult for adopting opinions which they know not, but in the revolutions of the human mind, may become their own at a future period. Confidence we may, and perhaps must entertain in our peculiar system, nor would we wish by any means to encourage a spirit of universal scepticism. But the recollection of the idea which has been mentioned, will connect modesty with confidence, and admirably prepare us for communicating our sentiments with that mildness we have recommended. And can any thing be more evident than that this mildness in our endeavours to impart the truth, is most worthy of the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus, and most likely to promote our cause? If we would violently compel a man of different persuasion to adopt our own; or if for this difference we arraigned him as a criminal; or if we exposed him to derision as destitute of ability or intellect, he might easily conceive us to be his enemies. He would certainly find it extremely difficult to persuade himself that we were his friends. Our conduct would tend to widen the distance we wished to annihilate. It would excite disgust and irritation; and if it did not absolutely prevent him from all enquiry, he would in consequence be led to enquire with such an accumulation of prejudice against the doctrine, that it would be morally impossible for him to attain.

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conviction. But let it appear that our object, instead of personal triumph or the ostentation of superiority, is only the interest of truth and man. Instead of bitterness and sarcasm, which numbers have employed in every age, let us employ fair argument and liberal address; we shall be honoured for the disinterestedness of our views, and the reality of our benevolence. Our neighbour will give us credit for our affection. He will gradually, and indeed speedily, contemplate the doctrine without fear and without prejudice; and peradventure (or admitting our principles to be just, even more than peradventure) we may gain our brother.

Would you then, my friends, adorn the doctrine you profess? preserve your minds free from pride and bitterness, and in the language of the Apostle, instruct in meekness those who oppose themselves against the truth.

In the second place, to meekness in communicating your doctrines, let me exhort you to add firmness in maintaining them. The Heathen Philosophers do not appear to have been sensible of the importance of defending valuable principles amidst opposition, hazard and disgrace, or if they were sensible of its moment, were scarcely supplied with motives sufficiently powerful to support such firmness. They were content to *think with the wise,*
while

while they appeared by their *conduct* to join in the common creed ; and in the hour of danger, would rather retract than maintain an opinion opposite to prevailing establishments. But the morals of Christianity do not admit of this relaxation of principle. According to the Gospel, important truths are to be avowed with all fearlessness, and to be defended at all hazard. " Whosoever," says the great teacher of our religion, " shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father who is in Heaven ; and whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in Heaven." Such are the personal consequences of adherence to important truth ; and the impressions it is adapted to produce in the minds of spectators, are such as cannot but be favourable to principles, which in times of peril and distress, are thus maintained with resolution and fortitude. It is an observation still just, however frequently it may have been repeated, that " the blood of the Martyrs has been the seed of the church." These men, it might be said, though possibly mistaken, must have been at least honest and sincere, and before they could prevail upon themselves in vindication of any doctrines, to endure the loss of all things, and even to embrace death with calmness, if not with cheerfulness, they must have been firmly convinced of the truth of their principles ; and these, if true, must have been principles full of hope and consolation. The consequence of
this

this reasoning was free and impartial enquiry, and the result of this, conviction.

And in proportion as this firm adherence to principle is manifested, in proportion as the spirit of Martyrdom is exhibited, the consequence must in every age be expected to be similar. Some indeed there will be who will ascribe the fortitude displayed, to obstinacy, pride, or the love of fame; yet others, and perhaps those a majority, will esteem those who display it to be honest men, if not enlightened, and will be led on seriously to examine whether their knowledge be not equal to their integrity; a process which must ever be of service to the cause of reason, and which will eventually cement what is the persecutor's object to disunite and destroy.

Happily for us, perhaps, my friends, as individuals, persecution with stakes and flames does not now hold over us her "red arm of vengeance." Yet the name ought still to be written on our statutes, and it is to be feared that the spirit still lurks in the hearts of some of our deluded fellow-citizens. "The world is not with us, nor the word's law."—We are exposed to the contempt of some, and less dishonoured by the hatred and invective of others. Not many rich, nor many mighty have enlisted themselves under our peaceful

ful standard ; and it is sufficiently known, that not a few who have embraced our sentiments tremble to stand forward in the explicit and public avowal of them. In such circumstances there is room for exhortation to firmness ; yet, God be thanked, my Fellow-christians, there is no room for despondence. If the importance of opinions can animate us to persevering exertion in their defence and propagation, let us look on the horrid enormities which attended the departure from our distinguishing principle, the absolute Unity of God, in Heathenish or Papal Rome. Let us consider that the grand object of the Jewish Dispensation was to preserve, pure and undivided, the worship of Jehovah. Let us reflect on the solemnity with which the Christian Lawgiver impresses on his audience this momentous principle, when he says the first of all the commandments is " Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord," adding, " thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." A principle of such moment even in the eye of Deity itself, must, sooner or later, be diffused throughout the world, and its consequence in the judgment of a Being absolutely infallible, may well invigorate us in its support.

Yet it may be desirable on some accounts, as already intimated, to keep in mind the possibility
of

of our error even on points we imagine most clear and important ; and admitting for a moment that this possibility will finally be found to be fact, it is consoling and animating to reflect, that we can do nothing against the truth, and that the discussion our peaceful exertions, our liberal researches will promote, will strike out for future generations that light we may unfortunately have failed to discover. We shall, by the application and encouragement of impartial enquiry, merit the character of benefactors to our species, and our reward will be great in Heaven. To the consciousness of deserving this character, and to the attainment of this reward, we must look for support amidst the obloquy and reproach with which our most benevolent efforts may be accompanied.—To this we must look for the reparation of every loss, and for the recompence of every pain.—And thus, even upon the supposition, that eventually it will appear we have peacefully, and candidly employed ourselves on a particular object, unworthy of our exertions, the idea of future and ample compensation for present inconveniences, may well carry us through them with chearful patience.

But when we return to the idea, that we enjoy the most satisfactory evidence, we are contending in the cause of God and Truth, and possess, consequently,

sequently, the most bright and pleasing hopes of success; we shall press onward with increasing ardour. Our Lord's personal ministry was not attended with more flattering success than has accompanied the exertions of the advocates of our opinions; yet for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame. And absorbed, like him, in the glorious prospect of human happiness, involving in a particular manner our own, we shall scarcely feel the flints or briars that may occur in our progress.

But in the third place, and as comprehensive of every thing else, I would exhort you, to adorn your doctrine by a life steadily devoted to piety, soberness, and benevolence. Barren as our creed may be imagined by many; destitute as it is of articles which they apprehend most efficacious and important, it nevertheless supplies abundant motives to the course of life we are now recommending: and even the principles we maintain distinctly from the great multitude of Christians, may easily be conceived to assist in our endeavours after it. Our minds are not distracted by various feelings to Divine Persons of different dispositions; and instead of worshipping a cloudy, frowning, vengeful Deity, who for no fault, or indeed for any crime, could devote millions of helpless creatures to eternal agony, we worship a God at once infinitely

infinitely powerful, wise and benevolent. Under the superintendence of such a Being, it should seem that we can repose with less anxiety and greater confidence.—Such a God we can more easily love.—Such a God we can more properly imitate.

But not to insist on the peculiar advantages for a pure and virtuous life, which may be supposed deducible from our distinguishing tenets, we shall farther observe, that these peculiarities of opinion are only parts of a system of religion, which at least comprehends the most powerful persuasive to moral goodness. And in order to evince this, we may imagine it unnecessary with unprejudiced minds to state more, than that we believe in a future and eternal existence, in which all past, present, and future generations of men will receive according to their works ; and in which, the more pure our virtue, the more ardent our piety, the more enlarged and active our benevolence may now be, the more glorious will be the reward conferred upon us. To influence reasonable beings to a steady course of rectitude, more than the firm conviction of these truths, can scarcely be deemed requisite ; and you will permit me, my friends, once more to observe, that unless our knowledge and convictions, of whatever nature, produce those practical effects they are calculated to accom-

plish ; unless we endeavour to act conformably to our particular principles and general system, we shall finally be involved in the aggravated condemnation of those, who well “ knowing to do good, do it not, to whom it is sin.

With regard to the effect which this strict conformity to real goodness is adapted to produce on our fellow-men, you will be enabled to judge from your own feelings. Let us place before our imagination, a man of whose creed we are totally ignorant, but whose conduct is distinguished by moral excellence. He is binding up the stranger's wounds, and pouring the balm of consolation into his soul. He is pure and temperate for his own sake, and for the world. He can deny himself luxuries, and even conveniences to supply the absolute wants of his brethren. His powers and possessions are regarded as the means of communicating happiness. If personal inconvenience, or even danger can serve the cause of his species, they are incurred with cheerfulness, and supported with heroism ; and even if his death can eminently promote this important object of his wishes and exertions, he is ready to submit to the last great sacrifice of all. Where is the person, my Friends, in whom this amiable assemblage is actually realized ? Where is the man who may easily be considered as the accomplished original ? Under whatever point of the compass,
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in whatever corner of the world, of whatever peculiarity of form or colour, we are eager to embrace him as a friend, and to claim kindred with him as a brother. He is the object of our most ardent affection. We would resemble him even in his thoughts and feelings. We may almost compleatly adopt the language of a celebrated writer: "We admire his morality, and would gladly subscribe to the articles of his faith; our heart is already with him, and we are prepared to be converted."

A good life is indeed, we surely feel, a most impressive argument. And if we wish, agreeably to our declaration and our duty, to diffuse our doctrines, we shall constantly endeavour to connect them with pure and active virtue. This will be discerned and admired by those whom the mists of prejudice might otherwise prevent from discerning the more direct evidence of truth; and men will naturally infer, that the unfailing fruits of righteousness can proceed only from a stock of heavenly origin.

Thus, then my Friends, let us adorn our doctrine. It will not easily be suspected, that in what has been advanced, I have assumed an office, which would ill become me; and that what has been said, was meant to upbraid, while, in fact, it was solely intended for exhortation, and of this, even

as applicable to themselves ; the best and wisest will always admit the propriety. God forbid ! my Brethren, that we should ever afford particular cause for upbraiding ; and far be it, that we should ever presumptuously boast. But though it would be improper to boast, except when called out in our own vindication ; there is a tribute of respect and applause *due* to merit, which, therefore, it can be no more than justice to discharge. And we cheerfully acknowledge, that we cannot without particular complacency, contemplate the names of some who have boldly stood forward in the illustration and defence of our peculiar principles. One eminent and venerable character, will here unavoidably force itself upon our observation. If the indefatigable application of superior talents, to advance the best interests of mankind, if rational and ardent piety, if fortitude under losses, and the exercise of the genuine spirit of forgiveness, under the most bitter persecution. If these are qualities which can adorn a doctrine, I scarcely need add, that the name of PRIESTLEY, is indeed a most valuable ornament to our cause. Without detracting from the blaze of evidence, in favour of our opinions, we may easily admit, that their diffusion has derived no small adventitious assistance from the moral lustre of this distinguished advocate. For our own sake, we may regret, that this great Regenerator, under God, of the Christian World, in
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modern times ; for our own sake, we may regret, that this splendid Orb was not permitted to complete his sufficiently short revolution within our immediate notice. We could wish to have seen him set in peace, as well as glory. We should have enjoyed a delightful, though perhaps somewhat pensive feeling in his evening beams. But his beams had too long dazzled and distressed.— They had penetrated the abodes of pollution. They had brought to light, the hidden things of darkness : nor can we wonder, that the lovers of darkness should rejoice in the departure of that genius and integrity, which, wherever they exert themselves, must inevitably tend to dissipate corruption and error. To avoid the rage of persecuting Britons, this illustrious character is gone, to the eternal disgrace of a land, which has long boasted its liberality and freedom ; he has departed, an *unforced*, indeed, but reluctant exile ; and has been followed by others, respectable for abilities and character, whose names enlarged the catalogue of this society, and whose absence, we are unavoidably led, upon this occasion, to regret.

Yet, though lost to our country, we may console ourselves with the thought, that they are not lost to our cause and to the world. The cause is still near their hearts, and their virtues will still adorn it. We may regard them as missionaries to distant

distant nations, nor is it impossible, that by their instrumentality, millions may be converted to the belief of genuine Christianity, without being first repelled or deluded by its corruptions.

Finally, my brethren, let ideas of this nature reconcile us to our loss. Let patterns of excellence ever rouse our emulation. And if we wish for benefit from our improved knowledge, or if we wish to diffuse this knowledge among others, let us be careful to impart it with mildness, to maintain it with fortitude, and to let our light *so* shine before men that they may see our *good works*, and glorify our Father who is in Heaven.

